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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CONAKRY 000238

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [AEMR](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: TFGV01: CONTE AGREES TO APPOINT A NEW PM, STRIKE
SUSPENDED

REF: CONAKRY 236 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: PolOff Jessica Davis Ba, Reason 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) ECOWAS envoy and former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida announced February 25 that President Lansana Conte has agreed to appoint a new consensus prime minister from a short list of names proposed by the unions and civil society. The inter-union coalition suspended the general strike effective at midnight February 26, designating the day of the 26th as a national day of prayer. Babangida offered himself as "moral guarantor" of this agreement and will return to Conakry on March 2 to assess progress.

¶2. (C) Babangida's intervention has yielded a necessary next step but whether it will be sufficient remains to be seen, even if it is fully implemented -- and the individual selected agrees to serve. The public event at which the ECOWAS delegation declared success was not attended by any government or military officials, although national television and radio broadcast the speeches. We will be closely watching the formation of the new government to determine how balanced and broad-based it actually is. As long as Conte and his circle remain in place, any government, no matter how well intentioned, is likely to be dysfunctional. End Summary.

ECOWAS Delegation Takes It to Conte

¶3. (C) Following intensive meetings with all sectors of Guinean society February 22-24 (Conakry 235, 236), the ECOWAS delegation led by former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida met on the afternoon of February 24 with President Lansana Conte. Meeting at his village home in Wawa, they informed him that the people would accept nothing less than for Conte to appoint a new prime minister, to serve as head of a government of broad consensus. Conte reportedly agreed to do so.

¶4. (C) The morning of February 25, Babangida and ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas asked unions and civil society to propose specific names of individuals they would accept as a prime minister. The ECOWAS delegation promised that Conte had agreed to accept to name a candidate from the proposed list. The unions were asked to put forth three names and civil society was asked to propose two

individuals who fit the criteria outlined in the tripartite agreement of January 27.

And the Nominees Are...

15. (C) Unions and civil society leaders told us that they wanted their short list to include all ethnicities and all regions. However, they did not directly consult with these individuals before proposing them. The candidates put forth are:

-- Mohammed Beauvogui, the only person proposed by both the unions and civil society, is Director General for Central and West African Affairs at the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, based in Rome. There since 2000, Beauvogui works closely with African heads of state, the U.N., World Bank and the IMF to implement agricultural development projects. Prior to this position, he worked for the U.N. Office for Project Services implementing U.N. initiatives, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Beauvogui is a young, fast-rising star within the U.N. system and the international community. With a Peuhl mother and a father from the Forest Region, he cuts across two ethnicities, but he is not readily identified with either -- an important asset at this critical juncture. Many of our interlocutors believe if chosen, Beauvogui will not accept.

-- Lansana Kouyate was one of the union candidates. Based in Abidjan, he is currently the Special Representative of the International Organization of "la Francophonie," working on elections and transparency issues. Kouyate served as ECOWAS Executive Secretary from 1997 until Chambas assumed this

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position in 2002. Prior to ECOWAS, Kouyate was U.N. Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs focusing on West African issues and Vice President of the U.N. Economic and Social Council. A former Guinean diplomat, he served as ambassador to Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Kouyate's mother is a Soussou from Conte's village, but he is of the lower griot caste, a disadvantage here. Kouyate has been asked several times in the past to accept the prime ministership and has declined each time. Kouyate was in Guinea for several days during the strike for consultations.

-- Kabinet Komara was the second candidate proposed by civil society. Komara is the Director of Projects and Administrative Services for the African Export-Import Bank based in Cairo, Egypt. He seems to have been associated with the bank since its founding in 1993. A journalist by training, in 1990 he was appointed to the Transitional Committee for National Redressment (CTRN), the entity that drafted and refined Guinea's constitution. Komara, an ethnic Malinke, is revered in Kankan where he and his wife consistently provide the local hospital with basic supplies.

-- Saidou Diallo was the final union proposition. Diallo is currently the General Director of the Guinean Social Security system. He is an economist by training and was a former Vice Governor of the Central Bank during the 1980s. Diallo was the Director of Integration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador to Nigeria in the 1990s. He is Peuhl.

-- A fifth candidate, the head of the Guinean Red Cross, was generally rejected due to political baggage from the Sekou Toure regime.

16. (C) Contacts in the unions, civil society, and religious communities indicate that Beauvogui is a clear front runner for them. He is young, of mixed ethnic heritage, and from the underrepresented Forest Region. Our contacts at the

presidency believe that if Conte were to name a new prime minister, he might favor Saidou Diallo, a "Guineo-Guinean" who has worked most of his life within the country in various administrative positions. Babangida told the representatives that Conte promised to name the new prime minister before March 2.

ECOWAS Announces Breakthrough and Moral Guarantee

¶7. (C) Representatives from Guinean society and the international community gathered at the Palais du Peuple for the February 25 press conference. Notably absent were the Guinean government and the military. Not even the National Assembly President, Aboubacar Sompore, attended, even though the event took place in the National Assembly's meeting hall. As the press conference was delayed a couple of hours, many in the crowd wondered if Conte had had a change of heart. When Babangida returned and opened the press conference, he allayed these fears.

¶8. (SBU) Babangida expressed gratitude for the honor to serve as special envoy to "this beautiful country that is held in high esteem throughout Africa for its special place in history." He thanked Conte for his warm reception and support for his work, demonstrating that Conte is truly "the father of the country". Babangida remarked on the patriotism and commitment of his interlocutors.

¶9. (SBU) Chambas read out the communique, declaring that following consultations, all actors agreed to the propositions set forth and that Conte agreed to name a new prime minister. The crowd responded with resounding applause and cheers. The communique stated that the unions would suspend the strike on February 26, with workers due back to work on February 27. Babangida would be the moral guarantor of this accord and return to Guinea on March 2 to assure that it has been implemented. Chambas also called on the international community to mobilize resources for Guinea's development.

Unions Call Off Strike and Others Give Thanks

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¶10. (SBU) Rabiattou Serah Diallo, CNTG General Secretary, thanked both Babangida and Conte for their contributions to the resolution. Ibrahima Fofana, USTG General Secretary, congratulated Guinea's workers on their achievements and said that February 26 should be dedicated to the memory of all the victims. He asked for the immediate and unconditional liberation of all detainees arrested during the strike and state of siege. He announced that the unions would suspend the strike at midnight February 26.

¶11. (SBU) National Council of Civil Society Organizations of Guinea President Ben Sekou Sylla remarked that Guineans are ripe for change. "No longer would they accept corruption, embezzlement, and misery," he said. He thanked Guineans in the Diaspora for their support and the international community for assistance in caring for the victims of violence.

Initial Public Reaction Appears Positive

¶12. (C) Guinean national radio broadcast the statements in their entirety on the February 25 evening news, summarizing the general content in all of Guinea's major languages. Initial feedback has been positive. Union and civil society representatives told us they plan to meet over the next few days to propose additional candidates to comprise a new

government. On February 26, Rabiadou Diallo called Poloff to express sincere thanks to the Embassy, the Ambassador, and other officers, and for the support of the American people in keeping attention focused on Guinea's crisis. Diallo said that she feels good about the progress made to date, but emphasized that now the real work begins.

¶13. (C) People were overjoyed with the ECOWAS-facilitated accord; many leaders left the Palais du Peuple singing the Guinean national anthem. The involvement of ECOWAS meant the crisis was no longer isolated as a Guinean problem. They underscored that Babangida's shrewd negotiations forced each side to see their shortcomings, making them amenable to compromise. Most felt assured that Conte will "have to" appoint a new prime minister. Others were far more hesitant and said that celebration was premature -- Conte has made this promise before and has yet to keep his word.

¶14. (C) The military leadership has made no public statements since General Kerfalla's February 23 order that all workers should return on the 26th. Union leaders and others emphasized that Kerfalla had no authority to issue this order and expressed doubt that anyone would obey it. They set their own suspension purposefully in contradiction of Kerfalla's date. The presidents of the National Assembly, Supreme Court, and Economic and Social Council have been conspicuously absent since the resounding defeat of Conte's proposal to extend the state of siege (although Sompore got credit among some local observers for allowing the assembly session to play out as it did). The religious leaders are now recognized by most to have taken their place as the key Guinean mediators. Current members of Conte's cabinet have kept a low profile for last few weeks, and many expect that they will soon lose their positions. Other government contacts have expressed their excitement about a "new era."

¶15. (SBU) At present, there is moderate traffic in Conakry and some smaller shops resumed normal business. The larger stores remained closed, awaiting the official suspension of the strike at midnight. The mood in the streets is calm and does not reflect the tension of previous days. There was no presence of military, gendarmes, or police in neighborhoods throughout the capital. The conditions are similar in the interior, where most citizens are preparing to resume normal activities.

Comment

¶16. (C) The ECOWAS-brokered deal constitutes an important step forward to the extent that it resolves the immediate, acute crisis. Authoritarian regimes seldom die, however, without putting up a fight. Even if President Conte appoints a new, more consensual prime minister this week, one can expect a battle royal over ministerial positions when the new prime minister begins to form his government.

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¶17. (C) Moreover, as long as President Conte remains in office, certain greedy members of his family, his corrupt civilian and military subordinates, and his business cronies will continue to be in a position to exert negative influence and to inhibit normal governance. Guinea appears to have overcome its immediate crisis, but government operations will likely remain dysfunctional as long as Conte is President of the Republic.

MCDONALD